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## Obey Pushes Congress To Address Problems Within FeMa

Previously Warned of Potential Trouble When Agency
Was Rolled Into The Dept. Of Homeland Security

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI), who was the Democratic floor manager for the \$52 billion disaster relief bill that passed the House today, said that, while he supported strongly providing the money, Congress was derelict in its duty if it did not take immediate action to restore the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to the life saving and community saving agency that it once was.

"FEMA has become the dumping ground for political cronies,â€□ said Obey, the senior Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee and one of the architects of the legislation providing disaster relief funding. "The current Director had no prior experience in disaster management before he joined FEMA. In fact, other than having been the Commissioner of the International Arabian Horse Association,

his only qualification is that he was the college roommate of the prior Director. We see now the damage done by allowing FEMA to be run by incompetents rather than experienced, qualified professionals.â€□

"Congress needs to undo the problems caused when FEMA was thrown into the bureaucratic mess that is the Department of Homeland Security and we must de-politicize and professionalize the leadership at FEMA so that it can move forward competently with this disaster and be better prepared to deal with disasters in the future,â€□ Obey added.

The proposal that Obey is pushing would:

1. Re-establish FEMA's status as an independent agency.

1. Return the position of the FEMA Director to one that reports directly to the president with no intervening bureaucracy.

 Require that the FEMA director have extensive experience in emergency or disaster related management.

1. Establish a five year term for the director to reduce the likelihood of the position being used as political patronage.

 Establish a Deputy Director with primary responsibility for disasters, both natural and terror related.

Obey is among many who have been concerned

about the diminishing role of FEMA since it was first placed in the Department of Homeland Security. In 2002 Obey sent a letter to other Members of Congress objecting to the move, citing a memo written by former FEMA Director James Lee Witt.

In his memo Witt said, "…the
Administration's proposal to place all of FEMA
into the new Department of Homeland Security
will diminish the focus of this new and important
agency and will dismantle what only recently has
become a successful and vital agency. Many
have argued for the need to bifurcate portions of
various agencies that are being folded into the
new Homeland Security Department. There is
probably no more compelling case than the
arguments to separate FEMA's natural disaster
responsibilities from its national or homeland

## security responsibilities.â€□

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